

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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R 230916Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3719

INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY BONN

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 BRUSSELS 03586

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: BE, ELAB

SUBJECT: FGTB HOLDS STATUTORY CONGRESS

REF: ANNUAL LABOR REPORT A-81

1. SUMMARY. BELGIAN SOCIALIST LABOR CENTER (FGTB) HELD ITS STATUTORY CONGRESS, FIRST SINCE 1971, APRIL 18-20 IN BRUSSELS. THEME OF CONGRESS WAS "SHAPING THE FUTURE" WITH ACCENT ON 1976-80 FIVE-YEAR PLAN TO TRANSFORM SOCIETY TO MAKE IT MORE SOCIALIST AND DEMOCRATIC. OVER 1,000 DELEGATES PARTICIPATED IN WELL PREPARED AND WELL RUN CONGRESS. FOREIGN TRADE UNION DELEGATES WERE PRESENT FROM NINE WEST EUROPEAN COUNTRIES AND YUGOSLAVIA. CONGRESS ADOPTED ACTIVITY REPORT AND RE-ELECTED SECRETARIAT AND BUREAU AND ADOPTED RESOLUTIONS ON IMMEDIATE DEMANDS AND FIVE-YEAR PLAN. CONGRESS WAS OBVIOUS SUCCESS FOR SECGEN GEORGE DEBUNNE (REELECTED) WHOSE THREE MAIN SPEECHES AND NUMEROUS RESPONSES TO FLOOR INTERVENTIONS WERE VERY WELL RECEIVED. NO OPPOSITION TO HIS COMINANT LEADERSHIP WAS EVIDENT DURING CONGRESS. FGTB PRESIDENT LOUIS MELIS DID ABLE JOB OF RUNNING THIS DEMOCRATIC GATHERING.

1. SOCIALIST FGTB ON EVE OF IMPORTANT TRADE UNION ELECTIONS

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ORGANIZED ITS FOURTH CONGRESS IN PAST 8 MONTHS AND FIRST

STATUTORY CONGRESS SINCE 1971 WHEN NEW DEBUNNE TEAM THEN ESTABLISHED MORE RADICAL SOCIALIST ORIENTATION FOR FGTB. 1975 CONGRESS UNDER THEME OF "SHAPING THE FUTURE" DESIGNED TO CARRY THIS ORIENTATION EVEN FURTHER. IN PRESENTING AMBITIOUS FIVE-YEAR PLAN FOR 1976-80 (SAME PERIOD COVERED BY OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT PLAN), DEBUNNE TEAM SEEKING TO TRANSFORM BELGIAN SOCIETY TO MAKE IT MORE SOCIALIST AND DEMOCRATIC. AT OUTSET SEBUNNE NOTED IN SPEECH ON UNEMPLOYMENT SITUATION THAT CURRENT ECONOMIC CRISIS IS MORE STRUCTURAL THAN CYCLICAL. HE SAID TIME RIGHT FOR MUCH NEEDED REFORMS ALONG LINES PROPOSED IN FGTB PLAN. BY PUTTING EMPLOYMENT QUESTION FIRST ON AGENDA AND MAKING IT SUBJECT OF SEPARATE RESOLUTION FGTB WANTED TO REMIND GOVERNMENT IT STILL PUTS NUMBER ONE PRIORITY ON PRESERVING EMPLOYMENT AT THIS TIME. AT SAME TIME DEBUNNE USED OCCASION TO REITERATE FGTB'S STRONG OPPOSITION TO ANY TAMPERING WITH AUTOMATIC INDEXING OF WAGES. THIS WAS ECHOED IN SPEECH BY SOCIALIST PARTY CO-PRESIDENT WILLY CLAES WHO GAVE STRONG SUPPORT TO FGTB'S OVER-ALL GOALS.

2. FOREIGN DELEGATIONS ATTENDED FROM FIVE EC COUNTRIES: FRANCE (CTG-FO AND CFDT) ITALY (CISL AND CGIL) LUXEMBOURG (CGT) HOLLAND (NVV), GERMANY (DGB) AND FROM AUSTRIA, SWITZERLAND, SWEDEN (LO AND TGO) AND YUGOSLAVIA AND SPAIN (UGT IN EXILE). IN ADDITION DELEGATE FROM CHILE (CUT), MENESES, WHO IS BASED AT THE FGTB HEADQUARTERS WAS ALSO PRESENT. MENESES AND OTILIO OF UGT ONLY FOREIGN DELEGATES TO ADDRESS CONGRESS. BOTH RECEIVED RESOUNDING OVATION WHICH OVERSHADOWED POLITE RECEPTION ACCORDED ICFTU SEC GEN OTTO KERSTEN'S SPEECH. LABOR ATTACHES FROM FIVE WESTERN EMBASSIES (INCLUDING US) ALSO INVITED TO ATTEND CONGRESS.

3. THREE RESOLUTIONS WERE ADOPTED BY CONGRESS. FIRST DEALING WITH IMMEDIATE DEMANDS PRIMARILY AIMED AT PRESERVING EMPLOYMENT. CALLED FOR END OF ALL OVER-TIME, SUPPRESSION OF TEMPORARY EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES AND TO EXTENT POSSIBLE AVOIDING PERMANENT LAYOFFS BY USING ROTATION SYSTEMS AND PREPENSION OR EARLY RETIREMENT. NINETEEN PAGE GENERAL RESOLUTION BASED ON 1976-80 PLAN ADOPTED UNANIMOUSLY AFTER SEVERAL AMENDMENTS MADE FROM FLOOR. MAIN EMPHASIS THIS RESOLUTION IS ON EXPANDING PUBLIC INITIATIVE THROUGH CREATION OF NATIONAL HOLDING COMPANY EQUAL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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IN SIZE AND IMPORTANCE TO BELGIAN'S LARGEST PRIVATE HOLDING COMPANY (SOCIETE GENERALE) AND AUTONOMOUS FINANCING FOR SEPARATE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMPANIES (SDR) IN EACH OF THREE REGIONS. ALSO CALLED FOR CREATION OF SINGLE PUBLIC TRANSPORT COMPANY AND CREATION OF PUBLIC NATIONAL BANK TO COMPETE WITH PRIVATE BANKS AND REVISION OF LATTERS' STATUTE.

4. IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS FGTB SUPPORTS GENERALIZED DIA-

ARMAMENT AND SIMULTANEOUS DISMEMBERING OF MILITARY BLOCS
AND DECLARES EFFECTIVE SOLIDARITY FOR POOR PEOPLES AND FOR ENDING
DICTATORIAL OPPRESSION PARTICULARLY IN SPAIN AND CHILE. IT
WELCOMED "END OF FASCIST DICTATORSHIP IN GREECE AND PORTUGAL"
AND SALUTED THE WORKERS IN THESE COUNTRIES FOR EFFORTS TOWARD
CONSTRUCTING DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY. (PORTUGUESE SOCIALIST PARTY
REPRESENTED BY SOARES ASSISTANT FOR LABOR AFFAIRS, CURTHO).
AT DEBUNNE'S INITIATIVE IN FINAL SESSION CONGRESS INCLUDED IN
INTERNATIONAL SECTION A STATEMENT ADOPTED IN PRECEDING WEEK
BY FGTB BUREAU INDICATING THAT BELGIAN PURCHASE OF NEW MILITARY
AIRCRAFT AT THIS TIME WOULD BE INOPPORTUNE. THE CONGRESS ALSO
ADOPTED RESOLUTION OF SOLIDARITY WITH 100 WORKERS OF VAL ST.
LAMBERT WHO HAVE OCCUPIED THAT GOVERNMENT OWNED CRYSTAL FACTORY
SINCE JANUARY IN AN EFFORT TO PRESERVE THEIR EMPLOYMENT.
NATIONAL SECRETARIAT (INCLUDING DEBUNNE) AND BUREAU ELECTED
BY SHOW OF HANDS WITH ONLY ONE MINOR CHANGE IN BUREAU COMPO-
SITION.

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5. COMMENT: IF NOTHING MORE CONGRESS WAS OBVIOUS SUCCESS FOR
GEORGE DEBUNNE IN HIS EFFORT TO TRANSFORM THE FGTB INTO A MORE
RADICAL SOCIALIST LABOR MOVEMENT. MANY OF THE OPTIONS AND GOALS
IN THE FGTB 1976-80 PLAN ARE EITHER SUBJECT OF CURRENT NEGOTIA-
TION BETWEEN THE TRADE UNIONS AND GOVERNMENT OR UNDER PAR-
LIAMENTARY DEBATE. THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE FGTB WILL BE ABLE

TO REALIZE THESE OBJECTIVES WILL DEPEND NOT ONLY ON THE
SUPPORT IT GETS FROM SOCIALIST PARTY IN PARLIAMENT, BUT ALSO
EXTENT THAT THEY BECOME ACCEPTED GOALS OF COMMON FRONT WHICH
FGTB MAINTAINS WITH CHRISTIAN LABOR CENTER (CSC) (IN THE GENERAL
RESOLUTION CONGRESS EXPRESSED HOPE THAT THE FGTB AND CSC WILL
PURSUE SAME GOALS AND WILL CARRY THE COMMON FRONT AS FAR AS
POSSIBLE). IN REMAINING DAYS PRIOR TO TRADE UNION (PLANT)
ELECTIONS (APRIL 28-MAY 30) CSC IS LIKELY TO AVOID OPENLY
CRITICIZING THE FORWARD LOOKING PLAN OF THE FGTB. HOWEVER,
IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN IF THE CSC'S SOCIAL CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE
AND POLITICAL TIES WILL PERMIT IT TO EMBRACE THE MORE SOCIALISTIC
OPTIONS OF THE FGTB PARTICULARLY ON THE PUBLIC HOLDING COMPANY.
IN ANY EVENT THE FGTB AS A RESULT OF THIS WELL ORGANIZED
CONGRESS NOW IS IN BETTER POSITION TO MAINTAIN IF NOT INCREASE
ITS PLANT LEVEL STRENGTH IN THE COMING TRADE UNION ELECTIONS.
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